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TWO SLATTERNS AND A KING

BY

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

STEWART KIDD
MODERN PLAYS
EDITED BY
FRANK SHAY

TWO SLATTERNS AND A KING

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Edited by

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MAIN

TWO SLATTERNS AND A KING

PERSONS

THE KING
CHANCE the VICE
TIDY the false SLATTERN
SLUT the true SLATTERN

498417

THE PROLOGUE AND THE EPILOGUE SPOKEN BY CHANCE

TWO SLATTERNS AND A KING

PROLOGUE

I am that cunning infidel
By men called CHANCE,—you know me well.
It is through me you met your wives;
Through me your harvest blights or thrives;
And one and all, through me, to-day
Hither you came to see the play,
Which if your favor still you lend,
As now, so on until the end,
You shall be taught what way a King
Though a sublime and awful thing
And even wise, may come to be
A laughing-stock,—and all through me!

(Exit)

(ENTER KING)

KING

I am the King of all this land:
I hold a sceptre in my hand;
Upon my head I wear a crown;
Everybody stands when I sit down. *(Sits)*

CHANCE *(Appearing to audience; he is invisible throughout the play to the other players in it.)*

Excepting me,—please bear in mind
I sit whenever I feel inclined. *(Sits)*

KING

Although my lands are wide and long,
My walls right thick, my armies strong,
I am not wholly satisfied.

CHANCE

That is because you have no bride.

KING

Who speaks?—Come forth and, if you dare,
Say once again what causes my care!
Why I am discontent with life!

CHANCE

It is because you have no wife.

KING

A woman in my royal house!
A woman! A wife! A bride! A spouse!
Bold stranger, this is not the cure,
For a woman I could never endure!

CHANCE

Per-CHANCE to-morrow you will find
You have altered your imperial mind.

(Exeunt KING *and* CHANCE *severally)*

(ENTER TIDY)

TIDY

I am TIDY, I have been
All my life both neat and clean.
From my outside to my in
Clean am I unto my skin.
Every day into a bucket
My hands I dip, my head I duck it;
And if the water plenty be
I sometimes wet some more of me.
This is my kitchen, where you will find
All things pleasant and to your mind;
Against the wall in orderly pairs—
One, two,—one, two,—observe my chairs.

In the middle of the room my table stands:
I would not move it for many lands.
My basins and bowls are all in their places;
The bottoms of my pots are as clean as your faces.
My kettle boils so cheerily,
It is like a friendly voice to me;
About my work I merrily sing,
And I brush my hearth with a white duck's wing.
Oh, full is every cupboard, sharp is every knife!—
My bright, sunny kitchen is the pride of my life!

(*Exit* TIDY)

(ENTER SLUT)

SLUT

I am SLUT; I am a slattern,
You must not take me for your pattern.
I spend my days in slovenly ease;
I sleep when I like and I wake when I please.
My manners, they are indolent;
In clutter and filth I am quite content.
Here is my kitchen, where I stir up my messes,
And wear out my old shoes and soiled silk dresses.
My table sags beneath the weight
Of stale food and unwashed plate;
The cat has tipped the pitcher o'er,—
The greasy stream drips onto the floor;
Under the table is a broken cup—
I am too tired to pick it up.

(*Exit* SLUT)

(ENTER KING)

KING

Now I will no longer tarry
For I think that I will marry.
Now the one thing in my life
Is to marry me a wife.
But I will not be content
With a wench that's indolent,
Or take a slattern for a spouse,—
I will go from house to house,
Unheralded—that there may be
No cleaning up because of me—
And that maid whose kitchen's neatest
Will I have to be my sweetest.

(*Exit* KING)

(CHANCE APPEARS)

CHANCE

That I am absent do not fear
For that you have not seen me here,
For know, I oft invisibly
Do move among the things you see;
And to confuse and thwart the King
Through Slut and Tidy, is a thing
Dear to my nature,—therefore heed,
And you shall see a show indeed!

(*Exit* CHANCE)

(Enter TIDY *in great disorder)*

TIDY

Oh, dear, oh, dear, what shall I do?
Oh, such a plight I never knew!
Though I arose as is my way
An hour before the break of day,

Here it is noon, and nothing done;
The milk has soured in the sun,
And the sweet, pretty duck I broiled
A neighbor's dog has dragged and spoiled;
I beat him with my hands and wept!
Straight through the window then he leapt,
And through the window after him,
With scratchéd face and bruiséd limb,
And on through mire and briar and bog
Hours and hours I chased that dog,
Stumbling, uttering awful cries—
While into my kitchen swarmed the flies!
I came back at half-past ten!
Oh, what a sight did greet me then!
My fair white sheets I hung so fine
Down in the black muck under the line!
And out of the oven from cakes 'n' pies 'n'
Beautiful tarts the thick smoke risin'!
I knelt down my tarts to remove,
And my quince jelly that stood on the stove
Up did boil, and, as you see,
Boiled itself all over me!—
All over the floor, all over the room,—
Whereat I ran to fetch the broom—
The broom! The broom—instead of the mop!
To fetch a broom to wipe up slop!
And with its handle smashed the clock's face,
Getting glass all over the place,
And knocked the dishes off the shelf,
And fell to my knees and cut myself,
And wept and cried and when I would rise
Could not see for the tears in my eyes;
So tripped on a chair and, to save a fall,
Caught at the table, then flat did sprawl,

Dragging the table down with me,
And everything on it, as well you may see!
I cannot live in such a state!
But where to begin is past my pate!

(*Enter* KING)

KING

I am the King of all these lands:
Down upon your knees and hands.
Wishing to marry me, I have said
That the tidiest maiden I would wed
In all my realm, wherefore I go
From kitchen to kitchen, that I may know
And judge for myself what maid is worth
To sit at my side in feasting and in mirth.
Untidy Spill-time, it is easy to see
That my fair bride you never will be.

TIDY

Oh, great King, hear me when I say
This has been a most unusual day!
It is by chance alone you see
In such a state my kitchen and me!
I can set us both to rights in a minute!

KING

In vain! I have set a trap and caught you in it!
Vain, wench, your lies and your pretense!
I see what I see and I hie me hence!

(*Exit* KING)

(Exit TIDY, *weeping)*

(ENTER SLUT)

SLUT

Lest you know me not in this disguise
I tell you I am SLUT, and I tell you no lies.

My face and my hands are clean and neat;
Fresh is my frock, trim are my feet.
But I assure you you are not wrong
To think that so tidy I shall not be for long.
And if the story you wish from me,
I will tell you how this came to be:
Dull was the day and tedious my book;
I saw no pleasure wherever I might look;
I had done everything that I knew how to do,
And I could think of nothing new.
But at last I thought of one
Thing that I had never done.
And I said, "I will take a broom,
And I will sweep this room!
I will wash this floor!"
I had never washed it before—
"All things in order will I arrange,
Although I hate order, for it will be a change."
So here I am, as you can see—
I and my kitchen as clean as can be.
But in a room as clean as this
My bones ache and I find no bliss.
So watch, and soon it will appear
Much less orderly and drear.

(*Enter* KING)

KING

Down upon your knees and hands!
I am the King of all these lands.
Wishing to marry me, I have said
That the tidiest maiden I would wed
In all my realms, wherefore I go
From kitchen to kitchen that I may know—
Yet stay! This kitchen is so tidy,
I think that you must be my bridey!

As far and wide as I have been
So neat a kitchen I have not seen;
Therefore I say you are my wife,
For the remainder of your life.

SLUT *(aside)*

To point him out his error at first I intended,
But least said is soonest mended.

(*Exeunt* KING *with* SLUT)

(*Enter* TIDY)

TIDY

Now once again with me
All is as it is wont to be.
Now once again you see me stand
The tidiest lady in the land.
If the King should see me now
He would tell a different tale, I trow.

(*Enter* KING)

KING

Oh, lovely lady, who are you,
That I am a talking to?

TIDY

She am I whom you did scorn
This very day at morn.

KING

It may not be as you have said,
For you would I gladly wed!

TIDY

I thank you for the favor, but
They tell me you have married SLUT!

KING

Oh, cock's bones! And strike me dead!
Is it a Slut that I have wed?

(Enter SLUT *dressed as at first)*

SLUT

So here you dally whilst I sit at home!
Never any more abroad shall you roam,
But sit at home with me for the rest of your life,
For I am your lawful wedded wife!

KING

Oh, woe is me, what a life will be mine!

SLUT

It is too late now to repine:
Home with me you come for the rest of your life,
For SLUT is your lawful wedded wife!

(*Exit* SLUT *with* KING)

TIDY

A slattern is a fearful sight,—ah, me!
What pleasure it gives so tidy to be!

(*Exit* TIDY)

EPILOGUE

Now that the play is at an end,
By CHANCE *you* have enjoyed it, friend;
By CHANCE to *you* his sweet was gall;
By CHANCE *you* slumbered through it all.
Howe'er it be, it was by CHANCE
The KING was led so merry a dance,
By CHANCE that TIDY met disgrace,
By CHANCE alone SLUT washed her face;

From morn to eve the whole day long
It was by CHANCE that things went wrong.
Wherefore, good friends, t' escape derision,
Be not o'er hasty in your decision,
For he who heedeth not this rule
BY CHANCE HE WILL BE CALLED A FOOL!

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